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The history of integration in the Baltimore public schools is presented. Racial imbalance in the schools was regarded as educationally undesirable. A brief flurry of protest occurred when the first Negro children were transported to white schools. This was followed by an abortive attempt to strip the school board of its autonomy and place its budget and spending prerogatives back in the city council. Community support of the school board prevented this threat from becoming a reality.

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BALTIMORE BEGINS TO INTEGRATE SCHOOLS

Edward Holmgren

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Despite its location below the Mason and Dixon line, Baltimore is not truly an "old South" city. Sometimes, it does exhibit a more or less southern response to issues regarding race. But changes are occurring and Baltimore is moving; not always with speed, considering the reluctance of some to face up to the realities of a new era.

For some time the critical pressure point of the race relations struggle has focused on public accommodations and equal employment opportunity legislation. The headlines describing the Gwynn Oak Park demonstrations of 1963, which attracted international attention, were a partial indication of the problems that Baltimore is facing.

While these demonstrations were taking place, a quiet revolution was occurring which will have broader implications for the city and its efforts to accord every citizen his legitimate place in the life of the city.

It all began in 1954. Two weeks after the Supreme Court ruled in the school desegregation cases, the Baltimore Board of School Commissioners moved to declare Baltimore the first southern city with a desegregated school system. The new policy was permissive—no district lines were drawn (except in the case of overcrowded schools) and pupils had an unlimited right of transfer to schools of their choice, subject only to the approval of the two school principals involved.

From 1954 to 1962 the racial patterns of school enrollment changed somewhat. In 1955 over 95 per cent of the Negro enrollment was in predominantly (90-100%) Negro schools; by 1962 this figure declined to 80 per cent. However, during these years the *number* of Negro children attending predominantly Negro schools had increased by over 17,000, or 30 per cent.

The increase in the number of Negroes attending one-race schools resulted from a combination of conditions: 1) Negro enrollment increased by fifty-one percent during the period, while white enrollment dropped nine percent; 2) the resegregation, by 1962, of many formerly white schools to predominantly Negro schools, and the resulting overcrowding in many of these schools; and 3) the expansion of ghetto patterns of residence. In 1951 an *ad hoc* parents' group began to discuss the problems affecting schools in racially changing neighborhoods. This interracial group noted that of all the factors influencing the racial stability of integrated neighborhoods the school was the most important. They embarked on a systematic study of the available information. Finally, in March 1963 they informally submitted their report to the president of the school board. In the report the board was charged with maintaining racial imbalance in the schools through its policies and practices on enrollment, transfer of students, school districting, transportation, part-time instruction, and school construction.

Superintendent George B. Brain was directed to respond to the parents' charges and the president appointed a five member sub-committee to study the matter. This committee included the board's two Negro members. Dr. Brain conceded that "there is little doubt that policy on the transfer of pupils, if based on race, can promote or alleviate school segregation." The Baltimore school system since 1954 had proudly pointed to its "free choice" enrollment and transfer policy as constituting full compliance with the mandate of the Supreme Court's desegregation decision. Until the parents' group made these charges there had been scarcely any examination of the operation of this system. The literal meaning of "free choice," if it were an accurate label, would tend to assure that any racial separation in the schools was voluntary.

However, the facts indicated that Baltimore never had a free transfer system. It became apparent that

transfer resulting from a change in residence were routinely approved and that transfer for other reasons *might* be approved by the two principals involved. In order for a Negro student to transfer to a non-segregated school he had to establish "an educational reason for the transfer." The superintendent made clear that "social relations of the child with other children would not be an educational consideration," nor would the desire for attendance at a school with a more balanced racial enrollment be "a consideration educationally for placing children together." Thus, it became practically impossible for a Negro student to transfer in order to enroll in an integrated school.

Districting had been instituted to prevent overcrowding at specific schools, or when overcrowding was a fact. In practice this meant that a student living within the school district could transfer to a non-districted school, and only those students residing in the district could enroll in that school. The determination to draw district lines was left to the superintendent and he exercised wide latitude in making the judgment. Superintendent Brain denied that race was ever a factor in drawing district lines. Nevertheless, it was conceded that for every pupil in the school system there was an IBM punch card which contained various data on the pupil, including among other things, his race and address.

In the case of two neighboring schools the pattern became very clear. School 242 was a districted elementary school with a 1962 enrollment which was 100 per cent white. A scant five blocks away is school 209 which was 98 per cent Negro in 1962. The district line of School 242 extended to within one-half block of School 209. Districting, in this instance, drew a line around the white-occupied housing in the shade of School 209 itself. This made School 242 "attractive" to the students in the white neighborhood—who were much closer to School 209—to attend School 242, because the district of School 242 was essentially white and Negroes were almost completely districted out. When School 209 opened in 1959 only 396 children enrolled, of whom 370 were Negro. The superintendent maintained district lines around School 242, and since 1959 had been transporting by bus approximately 250 Negro pupils from an overcrowded slum school to School 209. Thus, School 209 became a non-integrated school, notwithstanding the fact that the immediate neighborhood was integrated. The school board had instituted a transportation program in an effort to alleviate the problem of part-time instruction that had been created by overcrowding in many schools and the inability of the school construction program to keep pace with expanding enrollments. In selecting a receiving school for transported students it appeared that one criterion was race. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights quoted superintendent Brain as saying:

> To a large degree it was the policy of the school authorities in Baltimore, when bus transfer of a group of children was required, to select a receiving school with a racial composition similar to that of the sending school. (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Report on Education, 1961*, p. 106.)

In 1959 white School 242 had space for an additional 120 pupils, while School 71 (87% Negro in 1961), one-half mile away, was on part-time. The overcrowding at School 71 could have been averted by the transportation of 120 students to School 246.

No transportation was arranged. The superintendent did not deny these facts, but replied that School 246 was not districted and that any student at School 71 was free to enroll at School 246 so that a "transportation program by the Department of Education would have added nothing beyond what was already available. . . ." Thus, Dr. Brain conceded that the department stood idly by and allowed part-time instruction in a school with a substantial Negro enrollment, when such a problem could have been eliminated by the transfer or transportation of 120 students to a nearby white school. Would this condition have been al-

lowed to exist if both schools had been white and located on the fringe of the city?

Part-time instruction had become one of the most serious evils of the school system. A part-time schedule provides 20 per cent fewer hours than the normal five-hour school day, a reduction equivalent to 36 school days, or nearly two school months per year.

By 1962 over 12 per cent of Baltimore's elementary school enrollment was being cheated of one-fifth of its educational time. And the victims of this deprivation were overwhelmingly Negro—79 per cent. During the period 1955-1962 there were thirteen schools with Negro enrollments exceeding 96 per cent. Each of these schools had experienced part-time instruction for at least five of the eight years. In six of these schools some children might have gone through their entire elementary school life on a part-time basis.

The superintendent analyzed the sixty-eight schools in which part-time classes were conducted in 1962. There was no part-time instruction in any school which was 90 per cent or more white. Students at eight integrated schools (11% to 89% white or Negro) and 27 non-integrated Negro schools were on part time.

The superintendent finally contended that because of neighborhood segregation and other factors the problem of *de facto* segregation was social rather than educational: "To suggest that racial discrimination in housing or employment is corrected through racial consideration in determining school boundaries is to imply that 'two wrongs make a right' . . . certainly children should not be involved under any circumstance to cover up problems which adults are apparently unwilling or unable to resolve. Racial imbalances in the school result to a considerable degree from discrimination in housing and employment," he said. "To suggest that either or both could be corrected by the schools through manipulating attendance boundaries, programs, pupils, or whatever, is to admit defeat on all other fronts."

On June 6, 1963, a week before the end of the school term, the parents' group formally presented their documented report to the school board. The report urged the board to recognize in its policies that 1) inequality of educational opportunity is inherent in schools or classrooms which are segregated because of housing patterns or for whatever reason, and 2) racial integration is an educationally desirable objective to be considered in the formulation of school policy.

To this testimony was added that of the local NAACP branch, backed up by June Shagaloff, national education specialist of the NAACP. The latter called on the board "to eliminate segregation" and presented a series of "respectful but urgent demands—not recommendations, but demands." The board was not prepared for a total assault. It had met to hear the parents' final report and to issue its own policy statement on the charges raised by the report. The board's *ad hoc* committee reported that it found no "purposeful action . . . to maintain racially segregated schools. . . ." Wherever segregation existed it was the result of discriminatory patterns of residence and therefore "beyond the control of the Board of School Commissioners."

The board's committee acknowledged that districting did "limit, to some extent, the free choice of schools to those schools which are non-districted," and suggested the elimination of district boundaries. They warned against any plan which would serve to integrate the schools as a violation of the rights of the individual. The committee's report concluded with the hope that there would be an early end to part-time classes.

The board quickly adopted a series of seven policy changes which would end all district lines on October 31, 1963, provide for transfers (where the class size did not exceed 35 pupils), and preserve the neighborhood school concept. In concluding the meeting, President Frank promised consideration of the demands "with all hasty speed," but added, "I don't think that it is within the realm of

possibility that our re-examination can be completed in any such time as seems to be visualized."

The changes that the board did make were rejected by the NAACP which termed them "wholly unacceptable" and took issue with the board's premise that one-race schools were only the result of housing patterns. The parents' group said that it did not want the board to take action out of hand, because the board had only just received the report. The following week the parents dispatched an eight-page letter to the board in which they acknowledged the changes in districting and transfers as a "first step," but reviewed their reasons for believing the board had more to do.

The board president was quoted on June 14 as saying that it was still board policy not to force "children or staff members unwillingly into integrated situations" but that it was inevitable that more attention would be given to the racial aspects of school operations. "Anybody who wasn't affected by the whole spirit of the times and the representations that are being made in Baltimore and throughout Maryland," he said, "would be some sort of clod."

During July the board met with the parents and representatives of the NAACP. The board heard a demand that it adopt a policy statement "recognizing the educational undesirability of public school segregation in fact, and unequivocally committing the board to achieve maximum desegregation in the public schools."

In mid-July the superintendent announced plans to transport about 4,700 children (mostly Negro) from overcrowded schools and to set-up between 70 and 80 new portable classrooms. The superintendent added 88 classrooms (in 34 schools) to the previously used 46 rooms (in seven schools) for pupils from overcrowded schools.

By the time schools opened in September the City Solicitor had ruled on the legal position of the school system *vis-a-vis* the integration issue. On August 29 Solicitor Allen submitted a lengthy opinion that said that the school board had the authority to adopt policies designed to accelerate integration, as a matter of sound educational policy, but that the commissioners were not legally bound to do so. The president said he found the opinion "a correct and perceptive statement." Said Frank: "The Board of School Commissioners had never restricted its policies to the minimum standards prescribed by law and . . . the board will continue giving all of the students . . . as much learning experience with students of the other races as can be arranged." On September 5, the board adopted a seventeen point policy statement designed to implement the City Solicitor's opinion. The significant elements of the new policies are the recognition of racial imbalance in the schools as educationally undesirable and the acceptance of responsibility to remove this evil from the school system. The time-table for elimination of district lines was moved up thirty days to September 30.

A brief flurry of protest occurred when the first Negro children were transported to white schools. It was thinly disguised racism on the part of a few white parents at two local schools. This was followed by an abortive attempt to strip the school board of its autonomy and place its budget and spending prerogatives back in the City Council. Community support of the school board by many of the same people and groups that had fought the board just a few months previous prevented this threat from becoming a reality.

Thus, a beginning in the creation of an integrated school system has been made. Many of the problems of housing and employment still remain, but the schools are making a serious effort at reducing some of the problems created by years of inequality and segregation. A comprehensive civil rights ordinance (embracing housing, employment and public accommodations) now before the City Council has a good chance of passage. The civic struggle surrounding school desegregation provided much in helping Baltimore's leadership to face up to this challenge and opportunity.